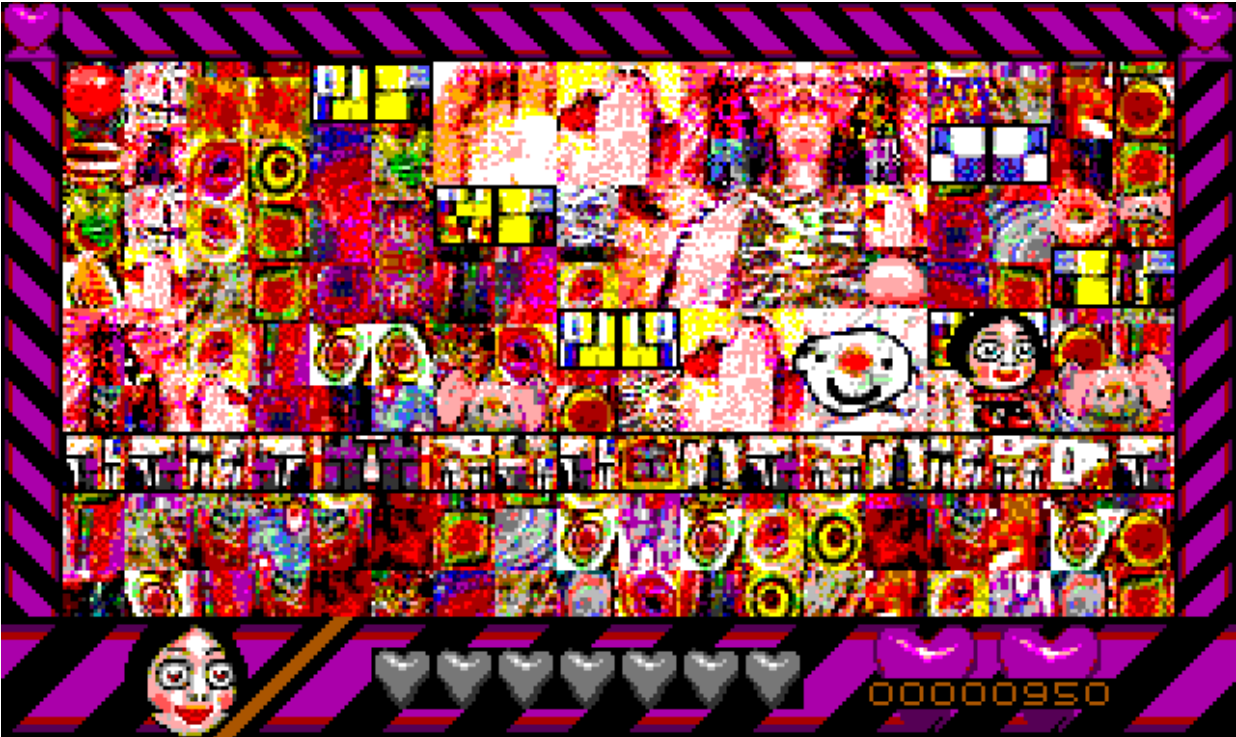


Just call my name and oil be there

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Record labels, they know a thing or two about music. I bet they'd be in a prime position to produce awesome Amiga games too. What sort of thing do you imagine they'd compose given free rein? Something along the lines of Rock Challenge? How about Mike Read's Computer Pop Quiz? Motorhead? Loom maybe? Top Banana was kind of half-created by a music label and look how well *that* turned out.



In any case, you don't need to *guess* because exactly this sort of music-game merger occurred in 1988. Delphine Record's first title long before they hit the computer press headlines with *Another World* and *Flashback* - operating under the umbrella of Delphine Software International - was *Bio Challenge*. Insert your own Daz Doorstep Challenge joke here. Remember the ads starring Danny Baker, Michael Barrymore and Shane Richie? I've done my best to forget, yet here we are.

As a French company, I'm also duty-bound to insinuate that - prior to going bust in 2004 - Delphine made *weird* games... because that's one of the prime laws of nature. Only in this case the rule of thumb predominantly doesn't apply. Their most notorious games - *Another World*, *Flashback* and *Fade to Black* - without meaning to be dismissive were *evolutions* of *Prince of Persia*. A wonderful game albeit one imbued with a cliched plot and 'safe' mechanics.

The remainder of Delphine's back catalogue largely consists of traditional point and click adventures and racing games. None of which are especially quirky or genre-twisting; Cruise for a Corpse, Future Wars, Operation Stealth, the Moto Racer series etc. Even Shaq Fu is a fairly formulaic beat 'em up once you strip back the unusual choice of licensed protagonist.



If any of Delphine's output were to fit the bill it would be Bio Challenge, and that's not exactly beyond the scope of genre categorisation. It's unmistakably a platformer at heart... sans a conventional (or useful) attack manoeuvre.

We play as... (we'll Christian him later, then likely forget) who has been fused with a robotic biosuit to enhance the likelihood of the human race's survival. Our genes are in self-destruct mode you see and this has been deemed the best solution by science boffin types blessed with steep foreheads who wear white coats with an air of authority. Remember

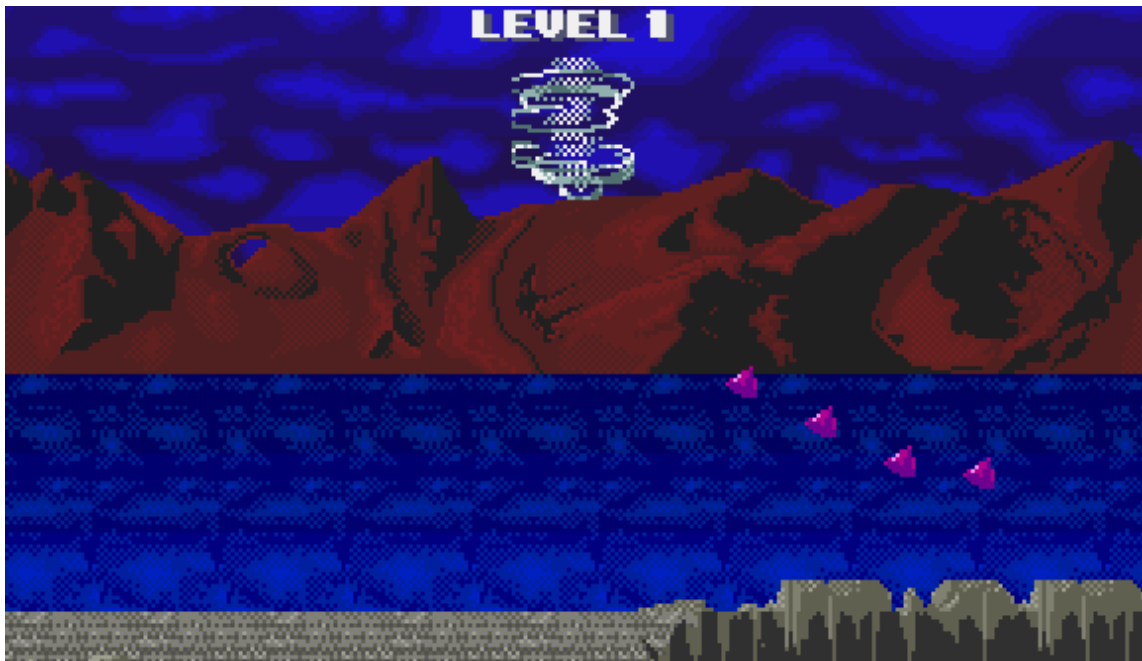
when we were kids and believed that doctors, teachers and presidential overlords knew everything and the world was safe in their hands? Pfft. Weren't we naive?



Anyway, *weapons*, or rather the *absence* of them. Imagine Sonic if he could spin - bear with me - yet not actually kill enemies by slamming into them pinball style. That's Bio Challenge.

Adopting the persona of what looks like the realisation of a sci-fi fan's dream crossover fantasy starring RoboCop, Thexder, Ironman and a Transformer, we must instead ponce about in the vicinity of 'charge slabs', thereby encouraging them to fall on top of baddies in order to crush them. This entails pulling off a Tasmanian Devil impersonation adjacent to them in the optimistic belief that the air-stream will dislodge the platforms, or back-flipping on top of them to give gravity a helping hand.

That's assuming you can shift the slithering, entwined snakes so they don't hiss at you, or whatever snakes do to harm *armoured* robots.



Remember that holding down the fire button for longer causes things to jump higher. Also, keep in mind that not all platforms are budgeable, some are only there for our own

elevation. Those that *can* be persuaded to drop display an indicator to inform us how many hits are required. Should we change our mind because we'd rather keep them intact it's possible to shimmy down the centre, dropping to the ground. Sometimes it's preferable to sliding over the edge, I think. Useful or not, the animation that delivers us is beautiful and that's good enough for me.

Slab-somersaulting is a sort of mechanical twist on the attack technique of Bub and Bob as seen in Rainbow Islands, except it's not necessary to cast the platforms before bouncing on them because they're already there. Apart from that "one of these things is not like the other." Sorry, I was trying to oust the previous ear-worm... the Daz Doorstep Challenge. All of the action takes place within the height of a single screen making the 'ordeal' (see intro text) a very linear experience.

"So Bio Challenge is definitely special in the technical department. The gameplay is, erm, different, and takes hours of practice just to get used to the controls.

If you enjoy really mastering a game, Bio Challenge is probably for you. But for the occasional time and robot wasting session, there are alternatives that won't cause so much angst and cursing. Very good, but very hard."

Amiga Computing (83%, July 1989)



Points, one of four pieces of a face-shaped amulet or occasionally bonus cauldrons are earned by dispatching foes. Some cauldron payloads deliver armour upgrades, an oil capacity boost, or smart bombs, others the ability to shunt floating pyramids into our adversaries.



Amulet portions are subsequently deposited in the sphere we begin the levels standing next to, to allow us to progress to the following stage. Never is it explained in-game what the purpose of this is; possibly there's a more thorough narrative in the MIA manual. Perhaps it's just part of the challenge/trial to assess whether or not the doomed human race could survive inside KLIPT suits of armour. Running the gauntlet with deadly consequences.



"Bio Challenge is definitely worth a look. It isn't the most absorbing game you'll have ever played, and there might have been just a little more to do. It's nevertheless an impressive release, and it's quite the cutest post-holocaust game I've seen in a long while."

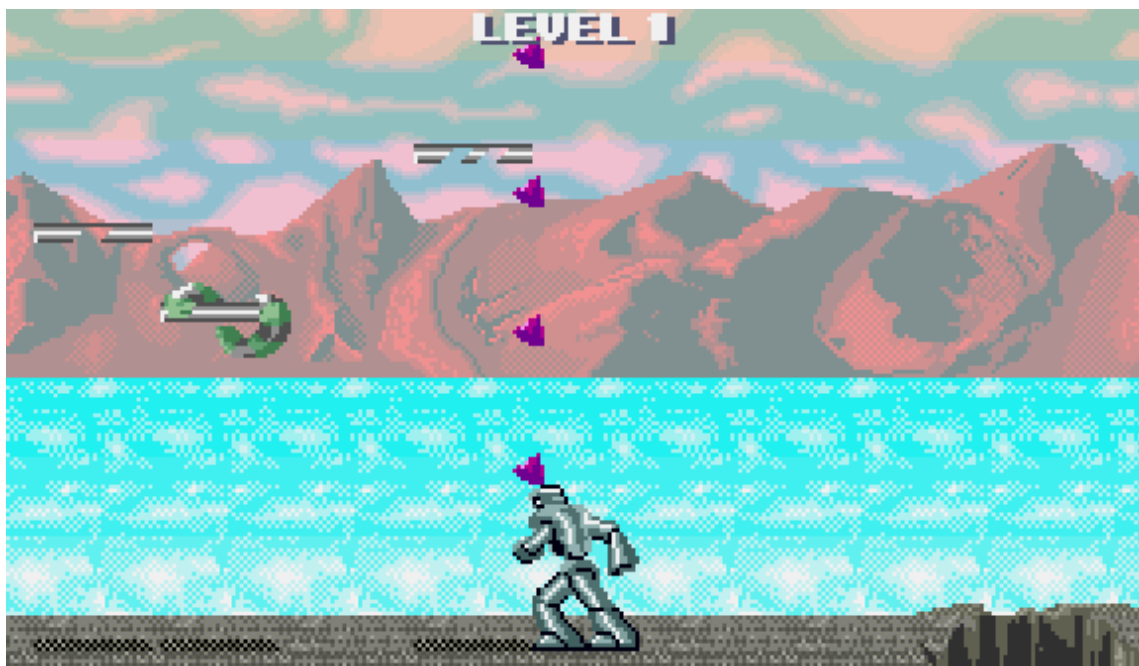
CU Amiga (75%, June 1989)



Rather than energy, we operate on oil, topped up by collecting barrels from the ground or those left behind by slain opponents. Whilst we're prancing around attempting to drive them into submission with our air-swirl there's a tendency to fall down gaping chasms in the ground. If it seems like we've hit a dead end and there's nowhere left to run it's usually because the way out is to be found in a floating teleport cube. With a silky-smooth day-night cycle effect transition we re-emerge in another zone that would look identical if it wasn't for the difference in illumination. One backdrop, in particular, reminds me of the Land of the Rising Sun. I can't imagine why. ;)

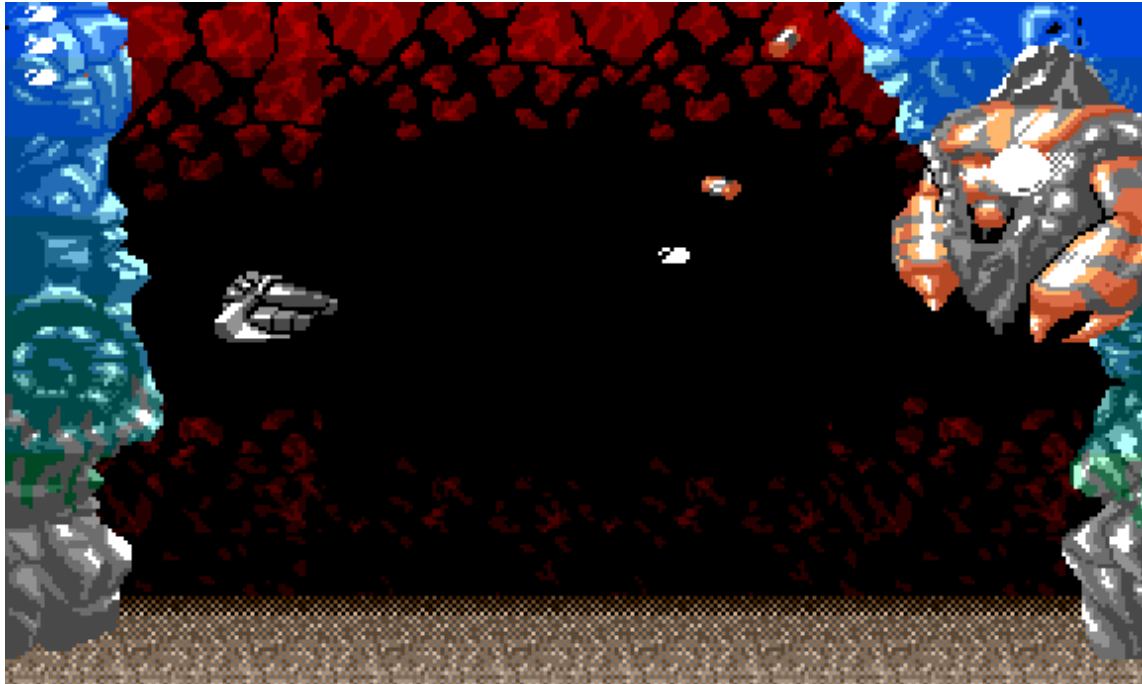


Elsewhere these transitions appear to be triggered at random without flipping between separate areas so make less sense.



Flipping acrobatics is in fact what it's *all* about. Leaping on or near slabs to kill robots, springing towards levitating synchronised formations of prisms to earn points, and vaulting into a spaceship-morphing gimmick to tackle the

end of level bosses. Well, except for the sixth and final boss seeing as there isn't one. Our experiment simply ends with a wah-wah-wah-waaaah rather than trumpeted fanfare, streamers and an animated denouement.



"It's nice to see someone coming up with a fresh aspect on a familiar theme instead of churning out the normal scroll 'n' shoot Amiga game. Bio Challenge is quite a weird game when you first play it, but you are soon dragged in by the atmospheric presentation and quickly adapt to the strange control method. Even when you think you've got it sussed, the odd alien thingy can stomp on you making you just that little bit more determined to come back and win next time. Right, I'll get you this time you metal son of a..."

Zzap! (84%, June 1989)

As opposed to the majority of the game, whilst hovering in the shrimp-like spaceship we acquire the use of a limited ammo shooty-zappy weapon. Make sure you blast end of

level guardians directly in the head otherwise any shots will be absorbed without causing so much as a scratch.

Problem is our cannon vanishes as soon as we touch down to earth, transforming back into the KLIPT's android mode, and this happens as regularly as it would had we been playing as Mary Poppins drifting downwards dangling under an umbrella. What goes up...

"The most striking thing about this is the superbly atmospheric presentation, complete with a very Tron-like transformation sequence at the start of the game. The in-game appearance is equally impressive, with some excellent graphics and very good sound. The game itself is rather fiddly to get into, since the control method is a little out of the ordinary, but only in much the same way as when beat 'em up games first appeared with their strange control configurations. Once you get used to it, it's quite hard to drag yourself away from the machine. Don't be fooled by the naff painting on the box, 'cos inside lurks a well presented and highly playable - if somewhat unusual - game."

Zzap! (84%, June 1989)

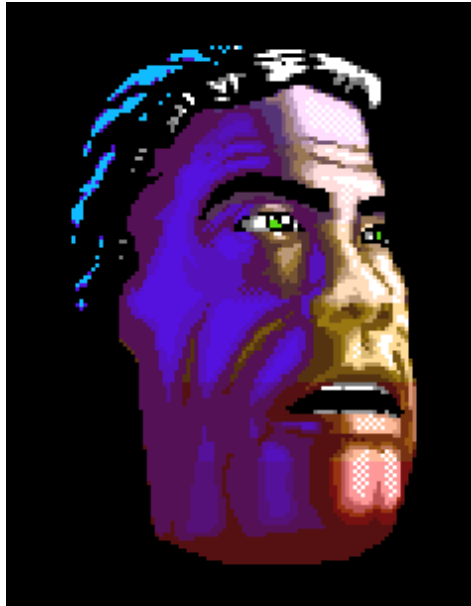


Surfacing initially on the Atari ST in 1988 released only in France, Bio Challenge took a year to cross the channel courtesy of Palace Software. At the time it was the second biggest seller across the channel after Captain Blood. This was partly I imagine due to its technical prowess and artistry; four layers of parallax scrolling, 160 colour palette (on an ST?), elegant backdrops and slick animation.

According to the back of the Atari ST box Bio Challenge will "only operate using a colour monitor or TV set". Has anyone tried? Does it translate to an indecipherable black void? I've read that the Amiga port employs fewer colours, though have no idea how many, or why this should be the case.

Also in its favour is Bio Challenge's captivating, otherworldly, sci-fi metal soundtrack by Delphine Record's own music maestro, Jean Baudlot. Arguably its headlining attraction where the Amiga port is concerned. A shame then that there's a dearth of music to accompany the original Atari ST

experience; only a title track plus minimal sound effects/speech samples that fail to plug the gap.



"When I heard that Richard Clayderman's producer was responsible for the soundtrack I must admit having visions of 'Housewives' Choice' and Mantovani strings. In fact, the score ain't half bad. It's very French sort of movie sounding - not quite 'Betty Blue' but reminiscent of the chase scenes in the Gallic thriller, 'Diva'."

CU Amiga (75%, June 1989)

We Amiga users might have stumbled across Bio Challenge via the 'Light Force' compilation pack, published by Ocean in 1990. A collection that also includes R-Type, Voyager and IK+.

Bio Challenge is perhaps the weakest game in the set as it's almost unfathomable without first reading the manual - it lives by its own rules, eschewing platforming tropes in favour of experimenting with new mechanics and limitations.

Limitations being the keyword, there's not a whole lot to it. A platform game minus an attack manoeuvre seems a bit weak and unfinished, to the detriment of the otherwise excellent, demo-quality presentation.

Bio Challenge is an odd title that is widely neglected in retro gaming circles today, particularly the Amiga version. Probably people don't know what to make of it, and can't grasp its premise without the benefit of studying the manual. When they eventually *do* ...by reading the (suspiciously positive) reviews they realise that it wasn't worth all the effort... or was it?

